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GLOBAL COMMUNICATION AS A RESULT OF GLOBALIZATION AND INFORMATIZATION¹

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Abstract: *Many researchers consider that the forces of globalization and informatization have a great importance for communication; these forces have already caused changes in some industries, policies, cultures and societies. Societies and communities must take part in this new global communication as they have no other choice; although, their way of participation depends on their specific social, cultural, economical and political environment.*

Nowadays, we have a global commercial communication system which is dominated by a small number of very powerful transnational companies. Until now, the companies from the communication field have sold information and entertainment to the people. Now they prefer to sell consumers (readers, listeners, TV spectators, internet users). We can easily notice the ambition of the new communication empires: to control the whole network, as everything is passing through these networks - broadcasts, movies, books, music, magazines - means communication.

Key words: globalization, communication, transnational companies

1. INTRODUCTION

Although the term “globalization” particularly refers to the economical phenomenon, its impact can extend to the social, political and cultural levels. Ideas, doctrines, habits, and cultural movements follow the path of the exchange of the goods between nations. For example, the international trade has been a spreading instrument for many religions; Buddhism in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia on the

¹ This paper was published in *Education, Research and Innovation. Policies and Strategies in the Age of Globalization*, Edited by Alina Bărgăoanu and Remus Pricopie, National School of Political Studies and Public Administration, Comunicare.ro, București, 2008, ISBN 978-973-711-161-6, p. 267-273

Road of Silk, the spreading of Islam in South-Eastern Asia, and Christianity in Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and the American Continent².

In order to comprehend the concept of globalization, events at a global level must be analyzed from a multidimensional perspective. Thomas Friedman, the editor of *The New York Times*, believes that we cannot see the reality of the contemporary world, nor can we understand it unless we take into consideration the connections established between politics, national security, culture, finances, technology and ecology. The classical borders between these have been reduced and will eventually fade away³.

2. THE EFFECTS OF GLOBALIZATION AND INFORMATIZATION

Experts of various fields have proven the complexity and interdisciplinary character of globalization. According to Thomas Friedman, the term globalization implies “the integration of the markets, the nation-states, and the technologies at an unseen level”⁴. He considers that the determining force for the uniqueness of this phenomena is “the newly discovered power of individuals to cooperate and compete at a global level”⁵ as a result to the accelerated informatization induced by technological convergence. Anthony Giddens, a British sociologist who is the director of the London School of Economics and Political Sciences, rejects the idea of globalization being defined only with regard to the interdependence of the global market and international financial flux. He claims that “globalization is not primarily economic. [...] The driving force of the new globalization is the communications revolution”⁶.

Informatization is the process by which the informational technologies, such as the internet or other communication means, transform the economical and social relations in such a manner, that the cultural and economical barriers are reduced to minimum⁷. Friedman considers that the new technologies have the capability to connect the world through stronger links, allowing companies to allocate part of their production, research, and marketing to various countries and maintaining control over the above mentioned through the new means of communication (computers, teleconferences, etc)⁸. Informatization encompasses all the instruments that have led to the progression from the industrial society to the informational society. The use of the new information and communication techniques, in all the fields of the economic and social life, has determined the growth of social productivity and has modified, at a large scale, the working and living style of the

² Randy Kluver, „Globalization, Informatization, and Intercultural Communication”, in *American Communication Journal*, Volume 3, Issue 3, May 2000, <http://www.acjournal.org/holdings/vol3/Iss3/spec1/kluver.htm>

³ Thomas L. Friedman, *Lexus și măslinul. Cum să înțelegem globalizarea*, Editura Fundației PRO, București, 2001, pp.41-47

⁴ T. L. Friedman, *op.cit.*, p.31

⁵ Idem, *Pământul este plat. Scurtă istorie a secolului XXI*, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2007, p.26

⁶ *The Second Globalization Debate. A Talk With Anthony Giddens*, Website: Edge, 9 April 2008, http://www.edge.org/3rd_culture/giddens/giddens_p2.html

⁷ R. Kluver, „Globalization, Informatization....”

⁸ T. L. Friedman, *Lexus și măslinul...*, pp.18-19

people. It has become a generating force for the economical growth, insuring the improvement of the level of life for the people in many regions of the world.

As a consequence of informatization, the companies, economies, and the states are reorienting towards the new technologies, insuring their survival, growth, and success.

The concepts of globalization and informatization are used to explain different phenomenon. But there can be a superposing in the social, political, economical and cultural approach. On the other hand, there is an obvious interdependence between them. Nowadays, globalization is more comprehensive than in the past. This is due to its dynamism imposed by new technologies, which allow the further attainment of various fields of life through a faster rhythm. Before, the ideas and technologies needed centuries to extend to the whole world. However, today this can be accomplished in just a few seconds. With the help of the new communicative means, new ideas can get around the world in just a few moments. News about events happening on one continent can affect in a drastic manner the financial markets all over the world. The present international financial crisis (whose effects are also being felt in Romania), has spread drastically from the USA to Europe with the significant help of the new information and communication technologies. Globalization itself allows the widespread use of the informational technologies, while creating a larger global market and clear strategic interests in order to adopt such informational technologies. The two pair-forces generate effects that have consequences. This is true not only in the economical field, but also in the cultural, social and political life of the society. Human rights, religious beliefs, security, environmental protection, and the rights of the workers are just a few examples of subjects which have become international or even global. For example, the spiritual leader of the Tibetan Buddhists, Dalai Lama, has followers all over the world, in such a manner that the manifestations against the repressions in Tibet are happening in all the corners of the world where Buddhism is not a majority religion. Even international stars are fighting for the human rights in Tibet.

As the industrial revolution has led to the acceleration of the urbanization and the development of new economical means, the revolution of communication, which is upstanding due to the informatization and globalization, is creating a new social framework. This includes the new "communities of information", the freedom of speech, the general public space and a globalizing spirit.

3. THE GLOBALIZATON OF COMMUNICATION – A COMPLETELY ACHIEVED PHENOMENON?

Nowadays, given the circumstances regarding the overwhelming expansion of the internet, which reduces the costs and brings communication to a global level, the ideas become more independent towards the other forms of globalization. As McLuhan predicted in his famous presentation "the global village", time and space are being reduced with the help of the new means of information and communication. "The evolution of the means of communication has reduced the importance of the physical presence in the favor of the way we live the experience of the people and events [...] as a result, the place you are in is less important than

what you know or live.”⁹

The globalization of communication implies the freedom of movement of ideas, information, images, and reporters. In this regard, many examples can be given, such as the movement of religions and the broadcasting of scientific knowledge. Often, the globalization of communication follows economical and military globalization: the ideas, information and people are following the economical and military fluxes transforming societies and markets, and at the same time, affecting their knowledge and behavior, as well as their attitudes towards culture, society and politics. Everything conforms to McLuhan’s predictions, which state that because of technological advancements, the world is “a global theatre which invokes the population of the world to not only participate as spectators, but also to be part of the distribution process”¹⁰.

Although globalization claims to incorporate the whole world, it is actually generating exclusion. An argument in favor of this remark is the fact that globalization is based on communication, but it is not equally accessible to everyone. The numbers are more than enough for revealing it: 90% of internet users are Westerners; in 2004, in the USA, there were 195 million internet servers, in Europe 22 million, whereas in Africa only 300,000; the city of New York alone has more phone channels than the entire continent of Africa. Such unequal opportunity has led to the exclusion of 3 billion people from scientific knowledge and progress¹¹.

An explanation of this situation is that a country, in order to participate in the globalization process, must gather a minimum level of required means and infrastructure to be able to be connected to the rest of the world. Friedman supports this argument, stating that it is easy to proclaim the freedom of the press and allow the free flux of public information, but it is difficult to insure and protect a truly independent press, which could publish the corruption cases within the structures of a state¹².

4. THE GIANTS OF COMMUNICATION

In the world nowadays, there is a very powerful global commercial system of communication, dominated by a reduced number of transnational companies. These companies resort to alliances, absorptions, and fusions through which they reach the efficiency record. Companies that used to be engaged in phone businesses, would want to join the field of broadcasting or cinematography; those that used to deal with informatics would settle in the field of video games; and while those who used to perform in the field of distribution would be willing to dominate the market of cellular phone service providers, private television, or music production.

In this manner, the communication industry is creating a complex web all

⁹ Apud. J. Meyrowitz, *No sense of Place: The impact of electronic media on social behaviour*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1985 în John Tomlison, *Globalizare și cultură*, Editura Amarcord, Timișoara, 2002, p.217

¹⁰ Marshall McLuhan, *Texte alese*, Editura Nemira, București, 2006, p.112

¹¹ Michel Goussot, „Mondialisation, pays émergents et pays pauvres: vers une nouvelle géoéconomie?”, în *Questions Internationales*, no.22, november-december 2006, pp.35-44

¹² T. L. Friedman, *Lexus și măslinul...*, pp.172-176

around the world. It can be seen as an “enormous spider web”, as Ignacio Ramonet names it.¹³ This web contributes to the generalization of the communication revolution and has enormous flexibility, worthy of the productions they launch.

Robert McChesney, professor at the University of Illinois, considers that the transnational companies in the field of communication function on two main principles¹⁴:

- The company, in order to be able to dominate the markets, must increase its dimensions in such a manner that the competition should not be able to overtake it. Companies, such as *Time Warner* or *Disney*, have followed these principles and they have tripled their dimensions every ten years.
- The company must participate in diverse fields of communication: film production, book publishing, magazines, newspapers, music, networks and TV channels, presentation and opening magazines, amusement, thematic entertainment parks, etc. In this way, the global profit of the communication empires is considerably higher than that of the sum of the profits obtained individually by each branch of the media. As an example in this regard, a movie can lead to the launching of a successful and popular hit - as a result of its presence as a soundtrack in the movie (*Titanic*), of a book (*Star Wars*), of some TV shows, DVD's, computer games (*Harry Potter*) or of new ideas for the entertainment parks (*Star Wars*).

The companies which are not media conglomerates have no chance on the communication market. The majority of the world's film production, TV shows, the rights of property over the cable networks and satellite, book publishing, magazines and newspapers as well as music production are all concentrated in the hands of fifty global companies, in what the incomes are concerned. According to McChesney, this concentration of power is destabilizing for any democracy of the world.

The giant conglomerations in the field of communication have become the new masters of the world. It is about **Time Warner** (which owns AOL, Time Warner Cable, HBO, Turner Broadcasting System, -including CNN-, Time.Inc and Warner Bros. Entertainment), **Walt Disney** (which acquired Fox Family Worldwide, which afterwards became the ABC Family Worldwide), **Vivendi Universal** (which acquired Havas, Channel+, the operator of SFR mobile communication, Maroc Telecom, and the Seagram group, the owner of Universal Music Group – former Poligram -), **Viacom** (which owns BET Networks – self proclaimed “the first media company for the black culture consumers”, MTV Networks and Paramount Pictures), Rupert Murdoch's **News Corporation**, **AT&T** (which dominates the planetary telephony), **IBM**, **Microsoft** (which dominates the informatics programs market and also intends to conquer that of video games), **General Electric** (which has taken control over the NBC television network), **Bertelsmann** (the first German communication group, with activities in the field of radio broadcasting, publishing, music production), **Pearson** (the owner of Financial Times Group, Pearson Education, Penguin Group), **Prisa** (the first Spanish communication group), etc.

Some thought that the apparition and development of the Internet might eliminate the monopoly of the media empire's powers. However, these predictions have been discarded by the evolution in the past years, through which the big

¹³ Ignacio Ramonet, *Tirania comunicării*, Editura Doina, București, 2000, p.133

¹⁴ Robert McChesney, „The Global Media Giants. We are the World”, în *Extra!*, November/December 1997, <http://www.fair.org/index.php?page=1406>

companies in the media industry, telecommunications and computers, have used their economical and financial power to colonize the Internet, so that it might neutralize its threats. The media industry has been transformed around a new generation of products and services related to the Internet¹⁵. For this reason, the big media companies have evolved together with the telecommunication and computer companies towards a global communication system.

Table 1. **The giants of communication**

The company	Headquarters	Sales 2007 (millions of dollars)	Growth 2007/2006
Time Warner	USA	46.482	5 %
Walt Disney	USA	35.510	5 %
News Corporation	Australia	28.655	13 %
Vivendi Universal	France	21.657	8 %
Viacom	USA	13.423	18 %

Source: *The Activity Reports 2007 of the companies. Websites of the companies.*

The target of these companies is to become a unique interlocutor of the citizens. The purpose is to offer information, alternatives for spending the free time, entertainment, sport, culture, professional services, financial information, etc, which the public will be able to access through all the available means: landline or cell phones, fax, cable, TV, computer, electronic mail, Internet¹⁶.

In conclusion, it can be stated that today we live a revolution, one that revolves around communication. Until this moment, the companies in this industry have sold information and entertainment to the citizens, whereas, now, they prefer to sell consumers (readers, listeners, TV spectators, internet users) to companies which are using them for advertisement (their customers).

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¹⁵ Dan Schiller, „L'accord Vivendi-Universal. Un prédateur à l'ère d'Internet”, în *Le Monde Diplomatique*, janvier 2001, p.28

¹⁶ Ignacio Ramonet, „Les seigneurs des réseaux”, în *Le Monde Diplomatique*, mai 2002, p.25

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